

Nichiren Shu News

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HILO NICHIREN MISSION INSTALLS A NEW RESIDENT MINISTER



EDITORS NOTE: When Rev. Hosho Sugawara returned to Japan in 2016 after many years of serving as the resident minister for the Hilo Nichiren Mission on the big island of Hawaii, the Hilo temple was left without a resident minister. With no replacement, other ministers in Hawaii took turns taking care of the members' needs and performing various special services as needed, such as Spring/Autumn O-Higan, Obon, funerals, and memorial services.

In December 2018, when Rev. Shokai Kanai was elevated to become the new Bishop of the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii, he had a new and inspired idea. Instead of seeking another priest from Japan, who would eventually end up having to return home or having visa issues, why not grow and cultivate someone locally in Hawaii to become the new resident minister? Thus began his search to find someone to fill this important role, which culminated with the installation of Rev. Shougou Kini in March 2024.

Rev. Kini completed his *Shingyo Dojo* training in October 2023. We congratulate Rev. Kini and wish him and the sangha every success as he fills his new post as the new resident minister of the Hilo Nichiren Mission.

By Rev. Shougou Kini

On March 23, I was installed as the Resident Minister of the Hilo Nichiren Mission, on the island of Hawaii. It was a dream come true. I started training for the position in December 2018. At the time, Rev. Shokai Kanai had just been installed as the new Bishop of the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii, the main Nichiren Shu temple in Hawaii.

I talked to Bishop Kanai and indicated that I wanted to receive training to either become a lay leader or a fully ordained Nichiren Shu priest. Furthermore, at the end of my training, I wanted to move to the Big Island and practice at the Hilo Nichiren Mission. Moving to the Big Island is a priority for me because my mother lives there, and I want to live closer to her in my retirement years. Additionally, I knew the Hilo temple and its members fairly well, as I was a frequent visitor of the temple since around 2010. I'm so happy that Bishop Kanai accepted me as his disciple.

At my first training session, Bishop Kanai introduced me to *Yohon*, a compilation of some of the more important sections and chapters of the Lotus Sutra for chanting. This stunned me. I had been a Nichiren Buddhist since 1984, but I only knew to chant Chapter Two and Chapter 16 from the Lotus Sutra.

At this time, I was still working a day job, so my training throughout the 2019 year was done on weekends and certain weekday evenings. In January 2020, I retired from my job, and soon I was coming to the temple for training every day, seven days a week.

A month later, I had my *Tokudo* at the Betsuin, and I was formally ordained as a Nichiren Shu trainee priest, or *Shami*.

At the beginning of that ceremony, I was dressed in regular dress clothes, a Hawaiian shirt, dress pants, and shoes. By the end of the ceremony, I had been physically transformed into a monk-like figure with a shaved head and dressed in robes and tabis. After my *Tokudo*, Bishop Kanai and I traveled to Hilo where he formally told the Hilo members that he was assigning me to the Hilo Nichiren Mission. After that, I began regularly flying to Hilo to serve the Hilo members on my own, about once every other month as my schedule permitted.

Then COVID-19 hit, and several of the required overseas training activities for me were canceled or suspended. This delayed my training in some ways, but it also opened some opportunities.

In July 2022, restrictions on travel to Japan were eased, and I was able participate in the required *Docho* ceremony where I was officially registered as a Nichiren Shu *Shami*. I also participated in an International Shami Study Tour in Japan in November 2022.

A Foreign Language (English) *Shingyo Dojo* was rescheduled for the Fall of 2023. Several other required training activities were rescheduled to allow English-speaking *Shamis* to qualify for *Shingyo Dojo*. The revised schedule provided a unique fast-track opportunities for me and several other English-speaking *Shamis*. So, in December 2022, I took my exams in English at the Nichiren Buddhist International Center in Hayward, California. Based on my exam scores, I was invited to participate in the required *Sodorin* in Japan in June 2023. After that, I joined the 35-day-long Foreign Language *Shingyo Dojo*, which ended October 30, 2023. *Shingyo Dojo* was physically quite difficult for me, but



I was able to complete it and became a fully ordained Nichiren Shu minister.

As I indicated, being installed as the Resident Minister of the Hilo Nichiren Mission in March was really a dream come true for me. From my initial training in December 2018 to formal installation as minister, this journey took a little over five years. At the installation ceremony in Hilo, I promised before the Gohonzon to lead and support the Hilo Nichiren Mission and to propagate the Wonderful Dharma on the Big Island to the best of my ability.

Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.



CHANGING LIFE ONE GESTURE AT A TIME

By Kanjo Bassett

The national standard for Japanese Sign Language (JSL) interpreter testing and registration started in 2001 (it had previously been left up to individual prefectures and cities). As of 2024, there are about 5,000 registered JSL interpreters. The number of interpreters in Aomori Prefecture is 123. In Mutsu City, there are six. However, there is only one Nichiren Shu priest in all of Japan who is a registered JSL interpreter, Jimyo Saito of Ryuhonji Temple in Mutsu City, Aomori Prefecture.

Rev. Saito encountered JSL in his first year at Minobusan High School. At the age of 15, he was strongly focused on his chosen path of becoming a priest, but he felt somewhat bewildered by the culture shock of living far away from home for the first time. During this time, he discovered the Sign Language Communication school club. "We would visit schools for the deaf and other places, I was hooked on the teacher's words." JSL would have a big impact on Rev. Saito's life. He practiced and memorized the basic 50 hiragana and number signs, but the number eight was the most challenging. He couldn't get his fingers in the right position due to stiff joints. He learned the importance of exercise and stretching. He also learned



the importance of facial expressions for effective sign language. This was particularly challenging for a shy person from the Tohoku region where people are reserved.

However, Rev. Saito thought that perhaps sign language was a way he could change his life. Sign language fired his imagination of a priest who could be, "Someone who chooses to be with the minority, a priest who listens to and understands the concerns of those left out of the mainstream." It showed him

the path to take. He became the president of the sign language club and held exchanges with local area high schools for the deaf. He eventually learned enough sign language to interpret in front of 1,500 students gathered for the Yamanashi Prefecture all-high-school festival.

Later, he established a sign language club at Rissho University and forged connections with sign-language groups at other universities, such as Tokyo University of Science, and

with organizations for sign-language interpreter training workshops.

After graduation and returning to Aomori, he became a trustee of a local area sign-language circle and continued his sign-language studies along with his priest duties. He took the national sign language interpreter test three times before finally passing it on his fourth attempt in 2022. An officially registered sign language interpreter at last, one of just six in Mutsu City.

In addition to serving as an official sign-language interpreter for Mutsu City, he volunteers for an LGBTQ-related sign-language study group that deals with issues of making partnerships mainstream in society. He helps the group examine incorporating partnerships in traditional Buddhist services and customs, such as Buddhist names, funerals, weddings, memorial services, and so on, working to make them part of everyday Buddhism. He also conducts online dharma talks every other month with simultaneous sign interpretation, a first for Nichiren Shu, with about five or six deaf participants each time.

Rev. Saito wants to be a bridge between the deaf and hearing worlds, growing the circle of deaf support, "Using my fingers and expressions, I want to teach the wisdom of the Buddha to everybody," he says with a smile.

LIVING IN THE ODAIMOKU Faith and Practice between Tokyo and Los Angeles

By Kanjo Bassett

June Takahashi is a true child of Edo. "Our family grave is at Hondoji Temple, a famous and important Nichiren Shu temple in Matsudo City, but we are third-generation Tokyo," she explains. Both of her parents' families were connected with Nichiren Shu, "but I was not particularly engaged with it. My mother has been a devout Buddhist and practiced the Lotus Sutra, even went to India for six months. But my father was not religious and did not practice." Her paternal grandfather however was a *sakan*, or plasterer, one of the elite traditional Japanese construction trades, who had a deep connection with Hondoji and helped rebuild it twice (after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and following the fire-bombing that destroyed Tokyo in 1945). "My grandfather on my mother's side and two other people helped move a temple from Fukushima to Asakusa,

the temple is called Seiouji and is near the Asahi Brewery."

June's journey started when she went to Los Angeles by herself in 1985 as a foreign student. "After studying English, I decided to stay and went to college to study commercial design and art." After getting her degrees and working five years in the field, she started her own design company in 1994 in Santa Monica. "It was a great business, and I ran it for many years." However, she worked too hard, and the stress took a toll on her physical and mental health. As she put it, "I didn't take care of my health and had to close my company. But when I met Bishop Shokai Kanai and his wife Kumiko, I realized there is something more than just working and achieving goals. They were just great. Sometimes you can't understand the value of practice until something happens in your life."

June's mother came to Los Angeles to help her out for a few months. "She

was looking at one of the local Japanese-American newspapers, and there was an advertisement for the Nichiren Shu New Year's Eve service, so we went." At that time, the extent of June's Nichiren Shu experience was limited to doing *gassho* and visiting the family grave. "I had never practiced or chanted anything, but meeting Bishop Kanai and his wife changed my life. They were so positive and really helped me through those difficult days when I was depressed and sick. I started practicing slowly, chanting Chapter Two and Chapter 16, and expanded out from there. The temple helped me, and I wanted to start helping the temple, because Bishop Kanai really wanted to help build the community to help others."

June joined the Los Angeles temple in 2000, eventually becoming a board member and treasurer, helping run temple operations for years. "It was work but so much fun and meaningful doing so many activities with everybody. Bishop Kanai is so energetic and never stops doing things, but he never cuts corners. I learned so much from him. We had many classes — *taiko*, *wasan*, and sutra chanting. Every day, there was activity. It really was a community. Everybody would come, and we'd cook potluck together. It was such a wonderful time."

June stayed with the temple after Rev. Inoue became the resident priest in 2009, helping with the huge effort of planning the 2014 celebration of 100 years of Nichiren Shu in North America that was hosted by the Los Angeles temple community. After the 100th anniversary, she moved to Las Vegas and joined



A group shot from when Archbishop Uchino visited Kannon Temple of Nevada in 2014.

Kannon Temple of Nevada, which had a special connection for her. "My mother organized and studied Buddhist statue sculpture at Tennoji Temple in Yanaka, and she donated one of her Kannon Bodhisattva sculptures (carved by Ryouin Yamataka from rare Yakusugi wood) to Bishop Kanai, which he later enshrined at the temple in Las Vegas." June's time in Nevada was cut short as she needed to take care of her aging parents in Tokyo. She has been staying in Japan for the last several years. She goes back to America when she can although she cannot stay there for long.

Her father passed away in late 2023. Her mother suffers from Parkinson's and dementia, but she understands and chants Chapter 16 perfectly whenever she hears June chanting. The power of Odaimoku. "No matter how dark the times you live in, it's important to be positive. I think that's one of the great teachings of Nichiren Shonin and the Lotus Sutra. It gives us a great hope and teaches that we are all equal, which is especially important right now. Like the recent eclipse in America, we all have different ideas and opinions, but everybody was so fascinated, gathering together to watch the eclipse. We have that one moment of wonder and humanity inside to share. Like the Buddha seed inside us."



June Takahashi along with her mother, Jimyo Takahashi, visiting the Las Vegas temple in 2013. The statue of Kannon Bodhisattva that her mother donated to Bishop Kanai is in the background.

STUDY CLASS ON THE LOTUS SUTRA AND NICHIREN SHONIN'S TEACHINGS



This is a detail from a wood relief illustrating the Burning House parable and is one of a series of carvings that depict stories from the Lotus Sutra and adorn the Taishaku-do, Shibamata Taishakuten in Tokyo.

The Seven Great Parables in the Lotus Sutra (2): "The Burning House and the Three Carts"

By Rev. Kosei Uchida

The Buddha revealed a parable in Chapter Three of the Lotus Sutra. There was an old, rotten house where a rich man lived with his children. Suddenly, a fire broke out. Though the father was able to escape, the children were too absorbed in playing to recognize the impending danger. To save them from the fire and to make them come out of the one and only narrow gate, the father used expedient means. He promised them that he would give them three kinds of carts, such as sheep-carts, deer-carts, and bullock-carts, according to their wishes. Upon seeing his children come

out of the gate safely, the father instead gave them a larger one called the "great white bullock-cart."

The verse part of Chapter Three says, "This triple world is my property. All living beings therein are my children. There are many sufferings in this world. Only I can save all living beings." The burning house stands for the world we live in. The fire represents the various sufferings we have. The children playing in the burning house are us and the father is the Buddha. The narrow gate represents the Truth that is difficult to reach. The three carts are for Sravakas (*shomon*), Pratyekabuddhas (*engaku*), and Bodhisattvas (*bosatsu*). To receive the great white bullock-cart means to be assured of your future Buddhahood.

Why did the father not give them one of the three carts, commonly

called "Three Vehicles," but the great white bullock-cart? This is because the teachings of the Three Vehicles are essential but not enough. Sravakas seek their own enlightenment by hearing the Buddha's teaching, while Pratyekabuddhas discover through the inter-connected causes of all things. Bodhisattvas, who are happy to help out those who suffer, are worth respecting. However, all three have to seek an even higher level to attain Buddhahood in which as the enlightened one, with the highest wisdom, can show deep compassion for all living beings and has the power to save them from suffering. As an expedient, the Buddha shows us the three teachings of Sravakas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Bodhisattvas, but He tells us in this parable that there is only one great teaching we should seek. This is called the "One Buddha Vehicle."

Nichiren Shonin's Teachings (2): Experiencing Four Great Persecutions

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

After Nichiren Shonin wrote his treatise, *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, in 1260, he was confronted with countless troubles. In fact, his life was threatened four times. His residence in Matsubagayatsu was attacked by angry Nembutsu followers on August 27, 1260. He was exiled to Izu Province on May 12, 1261. On his way back to Awa Province, Nichiren Shonin suffered an attack by Tojo Kagenobu and hundreds of his followers at Komatsubara on November 11, 1264. Nichiren was taken to the Tatsunokuchi Execution Grounds to be decapitated on September 12, 1271. Somehow, he was able to escape from all these life-threatening dangers. Legend says that white monkeys helped him out of danger in Matsubagayatsu, an elderly couple took good care of him in Izu,

Hariti appeared on a tree to save him out of the assault at Komatsubara, and a luminous body appeared, stopping the planned execution. Every time his life was saved, he truly realized the phrases of Chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra which states, "If one is hated and threatened with swords, sticks, tile-pieces, or stones, the Buddha will manifest men and dispatch them in order to protect them."

Chapter 10 also states, "Many people hate it with jealousy even in my lifetime. More people will do so after my extinction." He finds that no one before him was ever punished due to their faith in the Lotus Sutra, that none of the followers of the Lotus Sutra practiced as preached, and that he is the only person who truly reads the Lotus Sutra. What does "truly read" mean? Chapter 13 states, "We will not spare even our lives. We treasure only unsurpassed enlightenment." This means that as it is a matter of regret if the greatest teaching is not practiced universally, we will stand up to any difficulties and be ready to risk our lives to spread the Lotus Sutra widely in the Latter Age of Degeneration. Therefore, to "truly read" the Lotus Sutra means to practice and spread the Lotus Sutra at the risk of your life. Whatever troubles that may befall you, you shall continue to keep your faith in the Lotus Sutra and to spread the true teaching of the Buddha. This does not mean to sacrifice your life recklessly but to devote your life to spreading the Lotus Sutra in spite of any difficulties.

After experiencing those persecutions, Nichiren was convinced that all of the predictions in the Lotus Sutra were proven correct. He stated with conviction that, "I, Nichiren, am the foremost practitioner of the Lotus Sutra in Japan." (*A Letter to Lord Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro*) This conviction led him to write *Kaimoku-sho*, or "Open Your Eyes," while he was at Sado Island, which will be expounded on in the next issue.

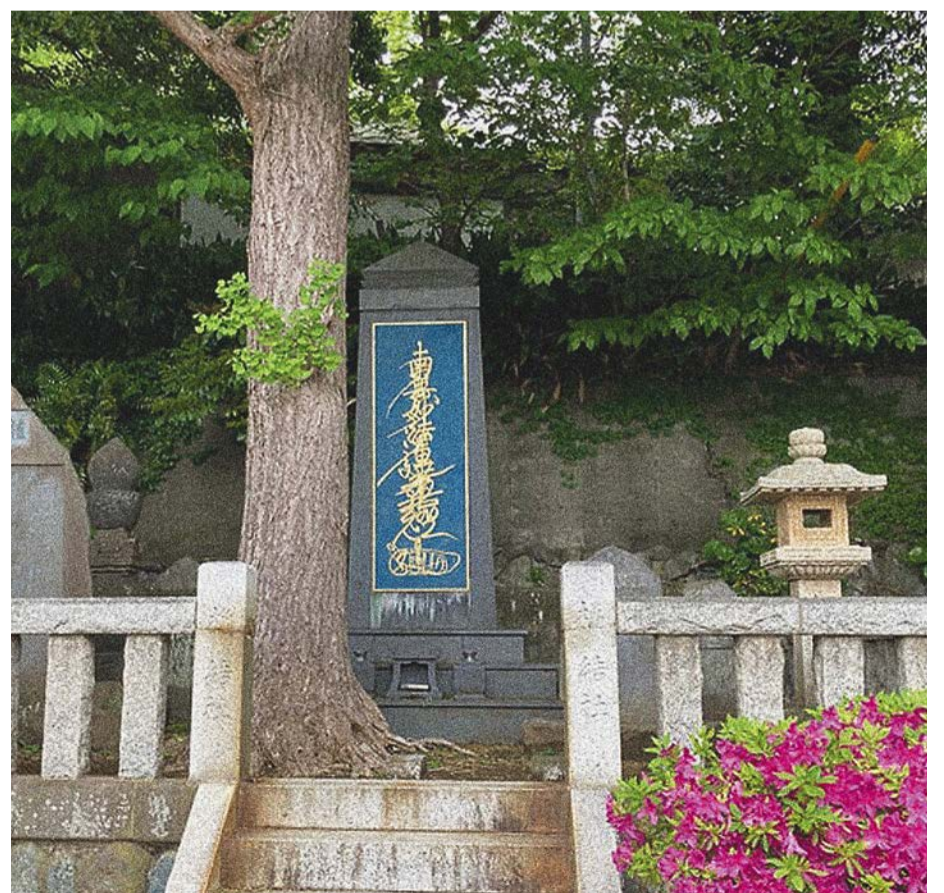
LOTUS JEWELS

T'ien-t'ai states that various sutras other than the Lotus Sutra preach the attainment of Buddhahood only by men, not by women. Truthfully speaking, even men cannot become Buddhas through those sutras.

—Nichiren Shonin, *Treatise on Subhakarasmha, Zemmui-sho (ST 46)*

Among the innumerable merits of the Lotus Sutra, its declaration that women are equally capable of reaching the enlightenment of the Buddha, continues to bring people into the practice of the Wonderful Dharma. As Nichiren shows in this writing on Shingon Master Subhakarasmha, or in Chinese Shan Wu-wei, the teachings that exclude anyone from enlightenment exclude everyone from enlightenment.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner



This memorial on the site of the former Tatsunokuchi Execution Grounds, where many were executed and where Nichiren Shonin was nearly beheaded, is in front of Ryukoji Temple in Fujisawa in Kanagawa Prefecture.

Mongolian Sumo Wrestlers Visit Joryuji Temple in Memory of the Mongolian Emissaries

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

Seeing many corpses and victims found in Kamakura, Nichiren Shonin said in his treatise, *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, "Horrible disasters, such as a great earthquake, a rainstorm, a flood, a famine, or a plague, occur continuously. This is because as people devoted their faith to the wrong teaching, good deities and saints left this country, and evil spirits behaved outrageously." He predicted that if people did not convert to the Lotus Sutra, two more calamities, domestic disturbance and foreign invasion, would definitely take place. His prediction came true.

In October 1274, Kublai Khan of the Mongol Dynasty dispatched 900 ships with 28,000 marines to Japan. Overrunning Tsushima and Iki islands, they reached Hakata Bay in the Kyushu region. The Japanese Army was routed and suffered a severe blow, but the Mongolian fleet was wrecked off the coast due to a wild rainstorm in the middle of the night and had to withdraw.

On April 15, 1275, five Mongolian emissaries along with Du Shizhong as a representative, came to Japan

warning the Kamakura government of another attack on a more massive scale, suggesting that Japan should surrender at once. The eighth regent, Tokimune Hojo, far from surrendering, rejected the offer completely and gave rather strict orders that the five emissaries



be decapitated. All of the Mongolian emissaries were in their thirties. Du Shizhong, age 34, composed a farewell poem before his execution, "On my leaving home, my wife and children gave me warm clothes, asking when I could return. I wished my dear family would



give me a splendid welcome if I come home with great success."

They were beheaded on September 9 at the Tatsunokuchi Execution Grounds, where Nichiren was almost killed four years before. Their remains were buried at Joryuji Temple, which was established for those executed at Tatsunokuchi. In 1925, five memorial towers were erected on the temple grounds for the repose of the souls of the five emissaries.

In 2007, Mongolian sumo wrestlers including Asashoryu, the 68th Yokozuna (Sumo Grand Champion), paid a visit to Joryuji Temple. They have returned regularly when their tours go through Fujisawa City in Kanagawa Prefecture. 15 Mongolian sumo wrestlers visited the temple on April 12, for the first time in nine years, to offer incense at the graves of the five emissaries. Terunofuji, the 73rd Yokozuna, said, "I am filled with deep emotion, because today we had an opportunity to visit the five emissaries who built bridges between Japan and Mongolia." Blue cloths were hung on the five memorial towers. The blue cloths, called "khadag," are a heroic symbol of respectability in Mongolia.

PENANG HOKKEZAN ICHINENJI TEMPLE IS MOVING TO A NEW HOME

By Ms. Leong Mun Wai

After more than 16 years at the current location, Penang Hokkezan Ichinenji Temple will be embarking on a new journey. The temple will be moving to



a new location within the year. Back in March 2023, the chairman received notification that the current building property had to be sold by the owner due to unforeseen circumstances. We are very grateful to the current property owner for allowing us to utilize the building all these years for the temple to carry out Dharma propagation.

Members of the temple went property scouting and visited many locations to look for a new space for the temple. Unfortunately, no suitable locations were found. Rev. Shingyo and Mrs. Imai heard about the temple's situation. They graciously offered, "Why don't you utilize the three story office building belonging to Mrs. Imai's late father and turn it into a temple?" Temple members visited the building and were happy with the new location. Members agreed to relocate to the new space. Hence, a renovation project team was established and a renovation project at the new location started in October 2023. Ichinenji is currently holding a donation

drive to collect funds for the renovation work for the new temple building. If you would like to support the renovation of the new temple building, please contact leongmunwai@hotmail.com

Ichinenji Temple members are looking forward to this move and working together to prepare the new space. This new journey is also a newfound opportunity for us to learn and to

share the Buddha's Dharma with the new community. As we embark on this journey together, let us always remember the Buddha's deep compassion for all sentient beings as stated in Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra:

*I am always thinking,
"How can I cause all living beings,
To enter into the unsurpassed Way
And quickly become Buddhas?"*



Calendar for June – July 2024

JUNE 15-17 Minobusan Kaisho-e, Commemoration Day of Nichiren Shonin Entering Minobusan

JUNE 25 Nitcho Shonin Memorial Day

JULY 13-16 Obon (Western Calendar)

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Nichiren Shu

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